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Maple Leaves
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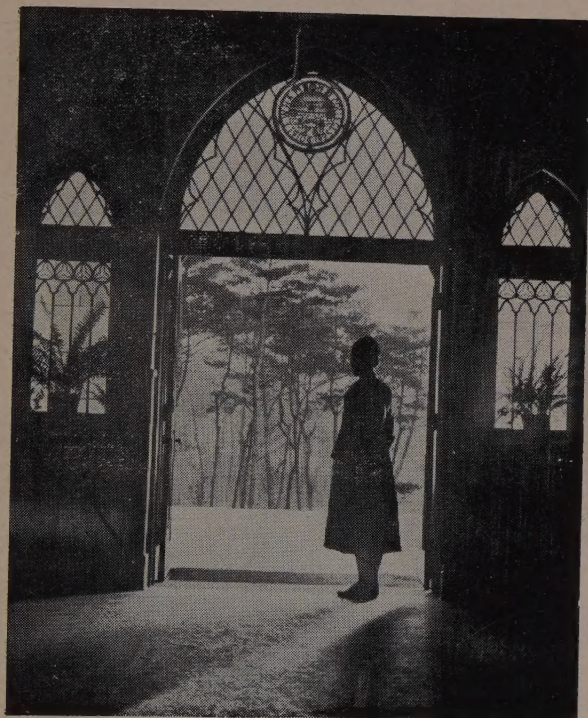
by

Catherine Baker

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To

Sunlight-through-Maple-Leaves



The Door Swings Wide

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Petition

Creator of all beauty, give me power
To capture loveliness ; perceiving eyes,
I fervently implore, for the tiniest flower ;
Grant insight for the marvels of the skies.
Give me discerning ears for the cautious call
Of wild geese when their wings and heads and beaks
Are silver-gold against November's shawl
Of sky. Help me attend when silence speaks.
O God, how often I am unaware
Of earth, letting its charm escape my heart....
Pierce me with sense of hillside, sea and air
And more, and more—I beg of thee the art
 Of using captivating phrase and word
 When all my being is divinely stirred.

Indwelling

Restoring power, refuge of all who need
Tranquillity and healing ministrant,

In thee let us abide ;

When tasks alarm and clashing voices dull
Our ears, when troubles overwhelm—in thee,
Our safety, let us hide.

Loved guest mysteriously entering every heart
That craves thy presence, live in us, through ways
Perplexing be our guide :

Indwelling strength be thou, the miracle
Of love and joy ; and while we rest in thee
Do thou in us abide.

Commit Thy Way

“Commit thy way unto the Lord—”
The narrow way of jostling crowds,
The wide way desolate-seeming,
The intersecting trails of nettling difficulties,
The blundering way,
The unknown way,
The daily way of old, familiar paths,
The two-forked road of indecision,
The way you lost—
Commit it all to God, and trust in Him,
And He will act—
With smiling tenderness
And love and wisdom He will act—
Commit your way to Him.

The "Splendor Within"

Within my heart, O God, be thou a splendor
Like flaming sunset skies after the day
Of storm; like April trees mistily slender,
Like light on beauty-piercing flowers in May.
Be splendor like the form of wild geese flying ;
Like true-curved shell; like leaves patterned with veins;
Like pearly threads of a spider's web defying
The summer's roughly sporting winds and rains.
Splendor of peace be thou, the glorious singing
Of calm's great harmonies, myself aware
Of vast tranquillity, my spirit winging
Because of that committed to thy care.

When I forget thee, when I cringe and cower,
Be thou the splendor of restoring power.

Compassion

I give to thee the past—the sins, deceits,
Mistakes, the foolishness, and that most hard
To give—the acts on which I placed a guard
Of silence powerful as iron cleats.
I've made ^usuch ignominious retreats
When faced by crises, only to be scarred
And bruised, merely to find myself debarred
From victory, a prey to small self-cheats.

O purity, thou dost not veil thine eyes
From this pathetic record of the years,
Thou dost accept my sorry gift; above
My desolation thou dost hold a prize,
Thy gift to me—I see it through my tears—
Today—Today is mine full brimmed with love.

The Road Ahead

The mountain road looks tangled, Father,
The rocks and giant vines and branches
Make me afraid—the way looks wild.

“You see the step before you, take it,
That step will lead you to the next one—
The path leads to the top, my child.

Adoration's Carelessness

A hidden treasure kept perhaps for years,
The perfumed nard sealed in a costly flask—
Not reckoning the price, heedless of jeers,
A woman bent to her impelling task.
Love, how unreasonable your promptings are !
All she had kept she lavished—her rapt face
Unmindful that the alabaster jar
Rested no longer in its secret place.—
Shall we not break the jewel casket held
Within our grasp, nor heed the scorn crowd-tossed
Heaven's sunlight shines through offerings love-compelled,
In losing we shall find more than we lost.
 The nard poured out, then gladdening release,
 The Master's reassurance and his peace.

A Prayer in Chapel

Ewha College

Our Father,
Incomparable Mystery,
Forbid that one of us should be a pilferer
This sacred hour
By stealing from our meditation's treasure-house
For problems of the day before us ;
Suffer us not to filch one little moment
For dwelling on another's faults ;
Keep us from being like ignoble thieves
Who let their stores of riches lie untended—
May not our minds be lazily numb.

Help us to vision thee
The teacher, healer, comforter,
The guest
To whom we give the abiding place of friend,
The unfailing guide through toil,
Joy surviving sorrow,
The alchemist who uses loneliness,
Defeat and failure for making the gold of character.
Discipline our meditation
Until we sense thy presence.

Teach us to think
Until we apprehend thy thoughts concerning us.
Be thou our strength,
Revealer of mystery to our questing minds,
The unerring voice in life's confusions—
Be thou to us the splendor of the morning,
The joy of noon and eventide,
The ever-beckoning Mystery,
The abiding companion.

Eternal beauty,
This early hour
Hear thou our prayer.

Thy Splendid Will

My will leads to confusing paths,
To indecision, fear, despair,
My will ends in captivity
Of spirit, pain and wilting care.

Father, only thy will is good.
Not for a moment let me shun
The way to freedom's joyousness—
Thy will, thy splendid will be done.

Ritual of Praise

For the eternal, radiant Christ ;
For men and women who know his power ;
For our companionship with a vast company who
pledged their loyalty to Thee ;
For thy faithfulness, our Father ;
For thy sure comfort when we despair ;

WE PRAISE THEE

That we can know the certainty of guidance ;
That peace is obtainable in the midst of confusion ;
That we can receive messages of beauty, hope,
cheer, grandeur, courage, from the world which
is our home, and from the Infinite ;
That all our ways can be committed to Thee ; the
past, the present and the future ;
That prayer brings strength, resilience, perspective,
courage ;

WE PRAISE THEE

Because we can trust Thee despite disappointments,
misunderstandings, perplexities, failure ;
Because of sweet surprises—words of kindness,
sudden smiles, cheery greetings ;
Because we have memories and hopes ;
Because humor is in the world, and laughter, and
youth ;
Because we share with the apostles and saints an
incorruptible inheritance ;

WE GIVE THEE PRAISE

For those who minister to us in illness ;
For poetry and music ;
For books ;
For friends ;
For glimpses of life beyond this life ;

WE GIVE THEE PRAISE

Presence

Wherever men and women toil,
Wherever hearts are crushed by sorrow,
Wherever little flocks are shepherdless,
Or there is wrestling with the tempest ;
Wherever there is need, perplexity,
Darkness, disease,
Loneliness—
There am I.

There am I to comfort and to cheer,
To walk and talk, companioning the road,
To lend my strength against the storm—
I am bread, I am the living water,
I am light and life,
I am the answer
To the faintest prayer —
Verily, I am near.

Communion

My brother,
Suddenly you are beside me
With all the mystery of a traveler
From distant lands,
With all the sweet familiarity
Of one abiding in the home.
You have ■ humorous smile
For my perplexed expression,
You have the comprehending gaze of one
Following me through the heart-beats of this life.

To the cherished older ones
You are the strong reliant son—
Countless times have they saluted you
In early morning vigils,
Through nights of stress
They have so known your presence
That their beloved faces
Resemble yours.

The sisters—
The eyes of one are fathomless, untroubled depths
Because she knows the anchor of your strength—
And that Joy-of-my-heart,
Your gift to me for my importunate need,
Who brings to my grave moods
Sunlight.

Brother,
We talk of these we hold so dear,
The fireside friends.
The family—
Close kin you are to each of us—
Suddenly you are beside me
With all the mystery of ■ traveler
From distant lands,
With all the sweet familiarity
Of one abiding in the home.

“Your Father Knoweth”

The charcoal fire, the bread, the fish, and call
To break the fast—O Christ of tenderest love,
Thou dost perceive the need of every heart—
After the hours of unrewarding toil
We lift our eyes—there close at hand, with warmth
And food and smiling welcome—there thou art.

Palm Sunday Meditation

A road's slow turn
Revealed that overwhelming view—
The city which had stoned her prophets,
A fortress knowing not the things
Belonging to her peace....
A strong young man
Could not behold the palaces
Nor gardens nor the temple's golden dome—
He looked at desolation—ashes for splendor—
A strong young man in tears.

He faced the coming days and nights—
Denial, gross betrayal and a Cross
Awaiting him.
Unto the end he loved his own—
And then—the Miracle.

Remembering the tears and love
I wait the anniversary
Of that high happening—
I wait the Easter morn, ■ dawn
Like Eden's early day,
Like some perfected saint's first hour in heaven—
I shall be listening for a voice
Through this hushed week
My heart shall be in contemplation
Of the miracle that shall be mine—
Sound of my name
Upon the lips of him who wept and loved,
Who loves and lives.

To A Young Misssionary

The wretchedness of towns and villages
Will stifle you ; the curious staring crowds
Will drench your soul with sagging weariness ;
The sight of pain will haunt you ; oftentimes
You will be criticised and ridiculed ;
You'll be denied and duped by those you try
To help—you, ■ disciple cannot be
Above your Master.

Familiar suns and stars which shine
Upon your new strange country will create
For you their unimagined loveliness ;
Mountains and hills will work their ministry
Of restoration ; waterfalls and streams
Will sing to you of trust in One who rules
His world and loves it ; every wayside flower
Will tell you of a Father's gentleness.

On lonely paths,
In humble homes and chapels, you will meet
A Presence—followers of the Mystery
Will bring reward, grandeur of fellowship.
So let us seek Him and our tryst with Him,
The dawn's still hour, will bring tranquillity
And wisdom through the day—He will not fail—
He will be found of us—He will abide—
Has He not said, "Let not your heart be troubled ?"

The Father

My son, though you abode with me these years,
You work austere on a shore too close
To waste-lands where your brother fed the swine :
Resentful thoughts, self-righteousness and rage
Grow wildly in those regions, and they damn
The soul as much as harlotry and wine.

Why stand outside? Your brother has come home—
Do you remember him, a little lad
Hiding from sullen faces, sensitive,
Fearing an angry voice, dreaming his dreams?
He missed his way, but now he's found the path,
He died—he needs a man to help him live.

Come back from your far country, come inside
The house and join the welcoming merriment—
Come, child, burdened with toil that's never done—
Unless you too come in, the fatted calf
Will have no savor in my mouth, I'll still
Be comfortless because I've lost a son.

Commital

My Father,
I commit to thee
My small affairs that tower with importance ;
I commit
Perplexities that stubbornly defy
My power to solve.

I commit
The outcome of decisions
Made in council with thy self ;
The vindication of my actions ;
Blame and criticism.

I commit
The hurting silence
Of those who fail to understand.

I commit
The criss-cross day
That bristles with hidden, sinister influences ;
The pin pricks of diminutive annoyances.

I commit
To thine unfathomable love
My self and those I love.

In this commital
I have release
For thought, for work, for joy.

Discovery

The [~]payers re-echoed aimlessly through heights
Where fancy tried to picture seraphim,
Long modulated phrases rolled in song
From lips to which the altar fires seemed strange.
The Lord seemed worlds remote. I turned away
From the cathedral's raiment-conscious throng.

I wandered to the forest, still resolved
Upon my quest, for one ecstatic breath
I seemed to hear a whisper on the breeze,
Perhaps a visitant to talk of God—
I turned around, but nothing spoke except
The woodsy nodding of anemones.

Dejected, I came back to own door,
There voices called to me in welcoming,
Dear careless words that had the power to embrace
With teasing satire. Suddenly I looked
With seeing eyes at those who greeted me,
I saw the Christ in each familiar face.

And then I heard His voice : "I dwell in these
Who grip the daily task with you." I know
I hear Him now in birds' unanxious calls,
In softly-speaking leaves, in brooks that hum ;
Also, I hear Him in the tones of those
Who sing and pray within cathedral walls.

The Mission Compound

The stars we watched after the swift descending
Of twilight's hour, dew on the grass at dawn,
A flock that slowly learned the Lord's defending—
Is all a dream ? Something forever gone ?
This unreality — machine guns planted
Upon the city gates, our chapel walls
Barbarously rent (here student voices chanted
Their hymn of faith)—an orphaned child's shrill calls—
Destruction, death around us, hatred's scorning—
But through the strangeness in this well-known place
A beauty like the loveliness of morning
Brings healing from the heart of time and space.
O Light ineffable, transcending Power,
That brings all heaven to mend this shattered hour.

Reality

As truly as the shadow means the form,
As north has complement in south, and west
In east, as surely as no might can stay
The rivulet from its predestined goal,
As certainly as winter ushers spring—

So grief makes room for overflowing joy,
And consolation heals the hearts of those
Who mourn ; the fainting pilgrim finds new strength,
The laborer earns his rest. Hunger and thirst
Know rich refreshing. Asking hearts receive,

To him that knocks the door swings wide, the pearl
Of greatest price awaits the questing one—
They who implore in secret have reward.
He that is lost shall find the certain way,
And death ? Ah, death is but the step to life.

“Made Perfect”

A piece of living porcelain, this you are,
My loveliness, beauty emerged from clay ;
A violin now ready for the sway
Of the master's thought ; a polished, flawless bar
Of richest jade ; a jewel like a star :
A vibrant sculpture, after years' dismay,
Complete—beyond the force that breeds decay,
Beyond the battering implements that scar :

A finished book that knows the sequel's leaves
Opening on tales of new-found skies and lands—
O darling heart, (forgive your child who grieves),
Time brings his work and lays the wrought design,
His miracle, within the spirit's hands.....
And yet, in all this beauty you are mine !

Beloved Feet

Beloved feet,
Free,
Fleet—
No longer
Do you drag across the kitchen floor
With help of crutch
(My heart breaking at that shuffling sound)—
You tread the heavenly ways
With ease complete.

Beloved feet,
No wearying day
Depletes your power to endure ;
Not restless now through long, sleep-cheating nights ;
Nor snow nor sleet
Makes you afraid,
No lonely road, no street,
Brings darkness or bewilderment.

Ministering feet
Past earth's deceit and danger—
Impelled by that same love
Which greeted lacerated hearts
With words of healing,
Swiftly you meet me when the hill is steep,
You slow your pace to mine—
(I used to wait for your pathetic tardiness)—
Beloved feet :
Free,
Fleet.

Your Words

Your words would come to me, phrases you spoke
Before you started on that pilgrimage—
I would recall some precious utterance
Brimmed with your courage and your friendly wit—
 Your comments would return
 To me, and suddenly
 My eyes would fill with tears,
 My heart missing you so.

Lately you speak in just the dear old way—
The same loved voice—but with a difference—
You utter phrases newly learned, your glad
Triumphant accents speak such victory—
 Some heavenly secret shines
 Upon your lovely face—
 And suddenly my eyes
 Are smiling into yours.

Your Birthday

Your birthday, precious one,
In heaven do they remember ?
What happy plan was carried out
By loved ones there
This morning ?

No longer can I scan the shops
For some sweet gift to bring to you,
Not even a flower—
But I do not forget—
Forgive my disobedient tears.

Heaven

I'm in the next room, dear—
The door between my room and yours
Stands wide.

Come to me in the swiftness of your thought
And sureness of your love,
My heaven is where you are—

Our tryst, a doorway.

Some morning
You shall step across the threshold.

Eastward

Soon we shall find the east,
What we had guessed
While watching western majesty
Through opal-changing mists,
What we had hoped
Is now our certainty—

The dawn on shores to be our homeland,
Shores we shall reach
By tiniest craft—
With nothing of fear,
Nothing of haste,
We shall arrive.

Earth's dust
Has glorified how many twilights.

Here we have infinitesimal taste
Of the feasting that awaits us
In that east
Beyond the setting sun—

Cool wells of water for the thirst-distressed,
Rest also for the universe of tired hearts—
And in the midst shall be a Father
With welcome in his eyes.

The Things That Live

Cease grieving, stricken one, because you said
The hasty word, because you let your gloom
 Plunder the sunshine from her eyes—
Do you still hold in mind some little slight
Of hers that made you weep ? Nay, you do not,
 Forgetting power is kind and wise.

She too forgets, for wrongs and selfishness,
The unkind word, mistakes and angry looks,
 Have died, they have no smallest part
In her new life, only the things that live
Abide with her—most dear of all, your love,
 Your love immortal in her heart.

God Writes Such Lovely Poetry

God writes such lovely poetry — the drops
Of rain on leaves of grass ; arrow-like clouds
Spearing their way across the mountain tops ;
Haze, mist and fog that hold the earth in shrouds :
Sometimes he writes in short, ecstatic lines—
A frog's swift, certain leap into a pool ;
Piercing with beauty, needless of the pines :
The pungent scents of evening stilly cool ;
Minutest flowers perfect in hue and form ;
In longer cadences he pens the sea ;
In odes delineates a chanting storm
At dawn—the lightning shows his artistry.

Far sunsets' splendor, stars, new moon and night
And human eyes are verse—I too must write.

Sentience

Wind—wind—

I've been neglectful of the comfort you have offered me—
Often I have dismissed you with an appraising word,
Then turned to more ephemeral matters.
Tonight I know you suddenly
And dearly.

You travel from remote, mysterious caverns,
You move to distant certainty—
I, too, am borne from far and secret places,
Regions known as Suffering and Knowledge—
I, also, travel on—
To Wisdom and to Life.

Wind—wind—

So many times you've tried to speak to me,
But I was ever hastening
To be within confining walls
Where argument, confusion and speared conflict
Press the soul.

Tonight I hear your voice, detaining Presence—
All coming days
Shall have a white sublimity
Because I have discovered you,
Your power and peace—
Beloved wind, the new abiding comrade of my thoughts—
Are you a messenger of God ?

Entrancing World

Entrancing world, you bring serenity
And strength. The patterned loveliness
From pools and waterfalls, from air and sea,
Teaches the miracle of growth and birth.
Each day some wonder charms our eyes and ears—
The artisans and artists of the ground,
The shimmering forms that live their brief careers
Winging the air, the mountain mists, the sound
Of little folk talking among the flowers
And leaves, interpreting of winter's dreams
When suddenly a night is packed with hours
Of magic—falling snow, delaying streams.....
O friendly world, you bring to us a wealth
Immeasurable—wisdom and joy and health.

Words

In childhood
I took delight in round sonorous words
That uttered wondrous things of man and earth—
Each sounded glory in my ears.

Still do I love the syllables
Of afternoon and rain and dawn,
Courage and birds,
Wildflowers and rocks,
Stars and prayer,
Faith,
Sky and sea, snow and hills,
Clouds and wind,
Trees—light—quietness—

Each word a poem.....

Three of these fashion a symphony—
Afternoon and rain and dawn.

Snow Pictures

I

Two sleeps before the dawn
An eery world—
White trees and hills and valleys
Silent under the moon ;
Nothing moves
Except the imperceptibly lengthening shadows,
Fretted designs of boughs and twigs
On the white earth.

II

At daybreak
The trees cast their latticed patterns
On the pale-rose snow :
Above the mist-fluffed valleys
Poise the far hills
Like castellated islands.

III

The snow
Makes of my tiny roof
A great bird's wing half folded :
The trees along the hill crest
Are women clothed in white
Advancing up an aisle
Of a long-naved cathedral.

IV

Proudly the branches of the old pine trees
Hold their burden, snow flowers,
Daffodils, lilies, magnolias.....
This afternoon a light wind stirs the icy air—
The flowers are drifting to the ground.....
On days like these the ancient pines
Live an incomparably ecstatic spring.

Creation Time

God said,
One arbutus-fragrant morning
Lifetimes ago.
“Let us make man.”

As the poet pencils odd designs
On margins of his paper
While searching for a perfect phrase,
So God made patterns in the dust
With his creative hands,
Little six-pointed feathery sketches—

“How shall we make him?”
Lingeringly he asked the words.

God,
Looking at the figures in the dust,
Perceived that while he pondered
On how to fashion man,
He had abstractedly shaped forms
For snowflakes !

Into the Morning

The world tries to imprison me—
I am wandering into the morning.

Dewdrops bring to mind
Rainbows I have seen
From mountain heights, from sea, from city streets—
A snail close to my feet
Demands an hour for thought.

The day is far too brief
For the precision of a honey-comb,
For leaves tossed to the valley
By youthful gales,
For wind-rumpled lakes,
For rippled sand,
For children in a field of buttercups,
For clouds and rocks and ferns—
One needs
Eternity for trees.

The world tries to imprison me—
I am wandering into the morning—
Perhaps to stay for noon and eventide.

A Hill

The^ε path
That clambers to the top
And down the other side to town—
The view of valleys,
Of shining railway—
Trees—
Pine needles, each one hanging
With a sphere of lately-fallen rain—
A magpie walking soberly,
Chipmunks—
Joy
Of rapturous afternoons—
A winter morning
And a crow winging his black way
Between white sky and snowy ground—
The tread, like heart-beats,
Of feet that love a trail—
Tears—
Prayers whispered on that trudge to town—
And the restoring silences—
A loved one
Picking violets in the twilight—
This is a hill.

November Day

The spell of that November day
Began with vision of the morning star—
The ocean's waves
Assured us of the world's recurring beauty.
Light built castles in the water's depths.
In heavenly heights a gull's spread wing
Mirrored uplifted eyes with loveliness,
And tree and bush were glorified by frost.

Squalls of wind
Tossed leaves that pilfered colors of the rainbow
While an uncertain sun observed them timidly.
Noon's bolder light
Touched tiny fishes in the stream,
And straight brown grass stood up transfigured.

But when an early evening filled the valley,
The hastening sun
Brought golden glory to our quiet world,
And then the miracle of light—
A friend's eyes shining into mine.

A Day's Rich Joy

When sleep rejects the wearisome decoy
Of lambs that must be counted as they run
To fold, I live again a day's rich joy—
I watch an ocean rhythmic in the sun,
I walk between old trees marking their tall
Precision in the temple ground's wide space ;
Then unexpectedly a waterfall
Curtains black rocks with misty-patterned lace:
I climb steep paths that menace with the power
Of causing loneliness and fright, but near
My side a comrade walks. Each leaf, each flower,
Each tree-embracing bit of moss gives cheer.

When sleep is tardy on its midnight way,
I live again a beauty-crowded day.

Maple Leaves

The pen delays. . . Words fail
Before the loveliness which phrases will not capture—
Maple leaves—
They hold their fingers open to the air
And rain, their forms are eery
In a half-revealing fog.
Storms bring them strength.
Earth vibrates when a breeze
Day-dreams through their branches.
Though clouds be gloomed on some too early winter
morning.
The woodland trail is full of light.
These loitering autumn days
Are but an interlude, dear heart.
The leaves are falling on our pools,
Our pools among the hills—
That fragile cargo drifting through the air
Is stanch with prophecy:
Our afternoons shall come again—
Released by beauty, we shall plan the morrow's
idleness—
A sunlit hill
And love discovering love—
And I, made inarticulate by the witchery
Of streams and waterfalls,
Of hidden blossom waiting for your eyes,
Shall try to whisper,
"Sunlight-through-Maple-Leaves."

Thanksgiving

That I am beautiful in mind and heart,
That I am strong and gently wise although
Catastrophe attempt to shatter joy;
That I can sing an evensong though day
Send storm— Because the world gives me a friend
Believing this of me, I thank thee, God.

The Path

I meet so many people on this path
When snow is falling or the autumn leaves,

Or when the April breezes play—

But here the sudden turning of the road
Is ever as it was when I met you,

Always it is a summer's day.

At dawn or noon, or when the twilight hour
Transforms the earth, I'm greeted on the road

By friendly eyes or cold or sad—

But here just where the path turns sharply east
I'm always greeted by your eyes, dear one,

Your eyes triumphant, bravely glad.

Home

Inside the school-room walls young minds and I
Embark on tours—sometimes we gain a view
Of other worlds, but just at four “Good-by”
Youth gayly shouts—then I come home to you,
I call your name, and you who understand
The anguished many finding valor’s power,
You answer me—I know your clasp of hand,
The refuge of your arms.

Our supper hour
Is sacramental. By the fire we cite
Old tortures slain, new victories won. Then sleep—
Your room is next to mine, we call good night—
God watches near. Each day when class rooms reap
But empty chairs, a desk, a map and chart,
I come to you—you are my home, dear heart.

Fulfilment

I knew heart-breaks ago that you would come—
The sea predicted it, the savage trail,
The rain-whipped moor I watched so many dawns.
Even the nights, the terrifying nights
Gave intimations of a ministry
Rewarding faith, ■ reassuring voice.
O love, dear love, the autumn afternoon
When my rent world waited a miracle,
I hardly dared to meet your seeing eyes—
The beauty of God's gift! The prophecy
Fulfilled, leading to ever-gladdening light!
I knew that help would come—dear heart, I knew.

Journey and Return

Sometimes the color shimmering through green lifts
Of ocean waves will speak of maple trees
In spring; clouds moving gorgeously in drifts
Of loveliness, dear heart, will change the seas
To autumn woods. A phosphorescent flash
Some midnight hour will magically bring
A firelight's friendliness, or the live plash
Of sunlight on a bird's dawn-ranging wing.
Should tempests trick you with ■ daunting qualm,
The cradling seas will hush the stormy noise
To peace, as you in time of stress can calm
A frightened little sister. On to joys
 You journey (and through meaningless alarms)
 Back to the harbor of my waiting arms.

Promise

I

The dawn comes slowly, oh how slowly, darling—
Clouds along the margin of the world
Prolong the night.

II

High over the bay a sea-gull flies,
Gold on his under wing
Tells us the sun has risen.

III

Today is fragrant with a miracle—
Plum blossoms
Fair, frail, unafraid and strong.

IV

An empty branch trembles in the woods—
The bird, aware that life is pressing up from earth,
Sings just above our heads—
He prophesies wildflowers and ferns.

V

A wintry April afternoon
Cannot destroy the certainty of spring,
Dear heart.

Welcome

To S.

I follow you, dear heart,
From the first good-by
You bid to dear ones there at home :
The miles you are alone,
The hours you are with strangers,
I follow you :
Fondly I mark the map and say,
“Just now she’s here.”
While God guides the many who are guiding you
Across the land and sea,
I follow you,
Until I fold you in my arms,
Dear heart.

Recompense

New worlds shall be our gain, worlds wide and sure
Because we stumbled up the windy climb;
The quiet harbor following the lure
Of distant seas ; spring's unretarded time
Close to the snow ; the welcome daily task
After the interrupting interval—
The doubt and strife, then more than we can ask,
Peace with her strength sure and remedial.
Be patient, waiting heart, the ecstasy
Of understanding love will act like balm
On wounds that sting ; after the storm will be
The stillness—magical, sunlighted calm :
 Day that began with fretting storm and stress
 Will yield to afternoon of loveliness.

To
M. B. F.

At first, perhaps, I shall be mystified
By all the newness of that life beyond
This life. For days, if days hold meaning there,
I'll ask to be a heavenly vagabond.

I shall have made a long-planned pilgrimage
With safety. Aimlessly, among tall trees
I'll follow trails nor care for far-set goals—
My guide shall be the roving, dawn-sweet breeze.

Then suddenly I'll stand inside a gate
Rose-arched and hear, (in memory held long while),
My mother singing songs my childhood loved—
And other days' content, my father's smile.

A little girl will call my name—as joy's
Flood-tide surprises me, a Presence fair
As the morning star, will speak—(I'd known his voice
Through gloom and cheer, through miracle of prayer)—

After my heart grows calm, I think he'll say,
"She's coming now." And up the wonderlands
Of woodsy ways where I so lately lagged,
You, *you*, dear heart... and wildflowers in your hands.

Awareness

Dear heart—

Some dawns will come with bleakness,
Some nights with threatening despair,
But dawns can never be again
Too cheerless,
Nor nights too black,
Because you came gladdening a hopeless day.

The road can never bring
A loneliness that really overwhelms—
I sense you by my side in joyous step with me,
And with us walks the radiant Christ:

I hear your voice blending with his
Like evening winds in harmony with streams
Grown calm after a storm;
I see your smile like sudden light glinting dark pools,
Like sun on mountain slopes in late-held afternoon,
Like stars among the branches of the trees.

Wherever we are—

Here, or on a beckoning trail
Among the eternal hills of that unhampered Life,
Your hand is clasped in mine
And over both our hands God's quiet hand—
Dear heart.

In a Japanese Garden

Dear heart, today we bow before a queen,
The flower garden's tall chrysanthemum,
Rich miracle of autumn's elegance :
It seems but yesterday that spring was come—
Sweetheart, do you recall how we adored
The first courageous blossom of the plum?

Surety

At dawn
We built a fire,
The grate leaped joyously
With snapping, crackling wood that flamed
And blazed.

And now
A bed of coals
Burns free from turbulence,
The hearth gives forth tranquillity
And peace.

Dear heart,
We know a fire
The years have built, it glows
With living flame—held by its strength,
We rest.

Claude Debussy

His harmonies hold color of old wine
By candle flame, of sunlight shimmering through
A flower's petals, and the hazy line
Of far horizons' mystifying blue :
Mirroring pools, soft rain, the morning mist,
The vastly stretching cloud-joined hills, have poured
Their beauty into him—like amethyst
His tone is caught from a bell's long lingering chord.
The dreaming Faun rolls on his back to play
The game of watching leaves above his head—
Ah, overpowering languor of a day
That merges grass and sky with a white nymph's tread.
 Music—fine lace from afternoon's warm light.
 And from the silky darkness of the night.

Tschaikowsky

The city where the troika bell and chime
Announced a stubborn zest for life, where sound
Was hushed against the thriftless snow's white gleam—
This joyous, fur-clad city held a friend

For you. The little patriot who spat
Upon the map of foreign shores, but kissed
His Russia ; Uncle Petia, the pet
Of welcoming children—these were a you unguessed

By your adoring one. The wildflowers dance
In your unfearing land of make-believe
After the Nutcracker becomes a prince—
But oh, how much had threatened trust and love

And faith before your goodby symphony
Expelled the demons that tormented you.

II

Compassionate and generous, with charm
You walked your way, eager that every one
Be glad : Peter, you never could be firm
With curious callers. Time adjured your pen

To write orchestra-frenzied harmonies—
You strangled when your cares and illness, fame,
Hindered the flow of melody. The blaze
In those blue eyes for faithlessness and sham !

The bruise might mend after a friend's deep hurt—
One wound was never healed through life's full years,
The worshipped mother left your boyhood heart
Disconsolate—such pain could know no cures.

Against a dull November twilight the servants drew
The shades— night for the anxious watchers, dawn for you.

“Marche Funebre”

The master plays with heaven-emboldened skill—
Inexorable he marks the marching feet ;
Relentless, pitiless, bound for the grave,
That tread.

Among the listeners a man conceals
His face—he is not weeping for the death
Of one beloved, he weeps because a hope
Is dead.

A hope which held so much for life and joy
Must have its burial—stifling the heart,
That melody ; clodding the power to feel,
That tread.

The Door Swings Wide

The door swings wide
To knowledge. Joy of books, wonders of earth
And sky, the wisdom of the centuries,
Wait for the fearless seeker at the door.

Inside are counselors ready to go
With young adventuring minds on quest of truth
And beauty found beyond the class-room's lore.

Inside is fellowship, hearts one in song
And prayer ; inside is vision of the Christ,
To rich, abundant life, the shining Door—
The door swings wide to God.

The door swings wide
To paths like those the Galilean walked
Long years ago ; to menace-holding streets
Where children play ; to sorrow-hiding door.

Outside is loneliness, but quietly
A Friend will come ; outside, exhausting toil—
The Comrade will unfailingly restore.

Outside is flowering of the spirit's growth,
And through the trees the glimpse of portal wide
To everlasting life, glad-welcoming door—
The door swings wide to God.

Sir William Osler

His hand was strength to sufferers in anguish,
The poor or aged never left his presence
Despairing utterly, the sorely cheated
Found hope and solace.

He turned the sick-room of a little patient
To fairyland ; himself the conjuring wizard
Who knew the names of all the shabby dollies
And left them splendid.

Death never failed to ask its puzzling question—
Each time that rival baffled all his power,
He paused, his misted eyes seeking to follow
The spirit's winging.

Sleep

We say your arms enfold us, but we know
The syllables lack meaning ; as we lift
Our eyes to poplars in the winter sun
And sense a beauty that transcends some phrase
We try to whisper, helplessly we drift
In fog of speech to capture what you are—
You're like an angel bearing in her hands
To all surrendered hearts a God-sent gift—
We find no words to name you, healing Presence.

Prologue

To a Missionary Report

These pages tell of unsurpassed romance,
Romance exceeding that of scientist,
Explorer or astronomer—they speak
Of women's ministry to womanhood—
Of miracles in hearts discovering God,
Of wonders prayer-wrought by the obscure and weak.

The church-sent women gave a name to those
Whom ageless custom deemed not worth a name,
In spite of opposition's grenadier
They taught a Father's love, they healed the sick,
They championed children's right to health and play,
They brought the joy of books and music's cheer.

The daughters of this small peninsula
Possess today what cannot be destroyed—
They know a strength sufficient for each need,
Peace not of earth. Within these pages lies
The history of the marvel-holding years,
Record but decades old. Dear reader, read.

Life

A flower,
A candle flame,
A tiny boat—as frail
As these, our breath hazarding earth
And sea.

Erect
The tender flower,
The candle burns, the boat
Slips harborward—frailty secure
In might.

For Mother's Birthday

Courageous birthday month—

Snow, wind, untiring cold,

My precious dear—

But flowers, and blue that dares

The stormy skies, assure

That spring is near,

A woman that bleak month

Received her miracle

Half understood,

A little helpless child

And dreamed the blossoming

To womanhood.

The winter tries once more

To chill and freeze, to gloom—

But heaven's arch

And stirring earth exult

In an old-new miracle—

Advent of March.

Mystery

Mystery—

A little child—cradled in a manger—

Wisdom finds him as it finds the hearts

Made pure by living close to hills ;

Among the wise and pure

The foolish and the unclean rush

And miss the little child, their morning star,

They fail to find the water that assuages thirst,

They cannot take the daily bread—

They stumble past ^{the} door,

That Mystery.

Christmas Eve

They had the silences, those men defending
From thieves and beasts the helpless, trusting sheep—
The shepherds knew, when flocks were fast asleep,
The quietness of stars through heaven's depths wending.

God had a secret for those watchers tending
The folds on windy plain and hillside steep,
(For ears that would not hear a word too deep)—
The good news of the son whom he was sending.

O God, we hear the world's dark death knell ringing,
Herods would blind all eyes that seek the Child,
Mars' underlings scheming, greedy, defiled,
To insane torment flesh and blood are flinging.

Father, tonight our spirits would be winging
To seek the silences of starlit hill
Or plain—come as our hearts grow wisely still
And reassure us with the angels' singing.

New Year's

Shake hands, old year, a swift goodbye to you,
Life must go on, let's not hold to the past,
Delay makes no advance for any child
Playing too long beside home's door—goodbye.

Good-day, new year. Show me new entrances
To life's wide wonderlands, teach me new skills,
Let me not shun the new faces you will bring,
In every stranger may I see a friend.

O Thou whose strength is given anew each day,
I thank Thee for this future untried year—
Its joys shall send me singing up the path,
Its grief and pain will make me lean on thee.

The unfamiliar year that lies ahead
Will soon be part of all the cherished old.

Japanese Treasure Ship

The Treasure Ship, my little boy,
Comes into port on New Year's eve,
The passengers are jovial men,
Tall gods of fortune, some believe.

A purse that's inexhaustible,
Hat of invisibility,
A rain-coat, symbol of good luck—
This is their baggage .. and a Key.

Now go to sleep, my little girl—
A picture of the Treasure Ship
That comes to port on New Year's eve
Under your pillow I shall slip.

Sleep on the picture, little boy—
The boat glides near at half her steam—
Sleep on the picture, little girl,
And you shall have a lucky dream.

Korean Autumn

Red peppers drying on the brown thatched roof,
And bulging pumpkins that would test the strength
 Of other props than straw ;
The broomcorn red in fields, the millet bent
With bounty ; golden, golden seas of rice,
 A black crow's scolding caw.

Persimmon trees and poplars, sassafras
And sunflowers adding red and gold to fields,
 To hills and windy ways,
The cabbages piled high on ox-drawn carts,
And earthen jars waiting the ritual
 Of kimchi-making days.

New, somber-colored thatch on every house,
The autumn's crowning task, making each home
 Tidy and winter-proof....
Beauty of harvest time...bronze, yellow, red ...
But ah, the scarlet laid against the brown ...
 Those peppers on the roof !

Korean Mill Song

(Translaton)

Round and round the mill wheel turns,
I have troubles, but my heart is glad.

I'll sing softly, gently,
Earth is filled with springtime beauty.
Here's a swallow,
What do you bring to me, little bird of the sky ?
Is that green blade in your beak a word of love ?
Joy of the spring—the mill wheel turns ?
True, I have troubles, but my heart is glad.

Korean Farmer Song

(Translation)

Farmer boy, give ear to me,
Farmer boy, hear, oh hear.
Truly, you have three bags of rice,
Large is the field you harvested,
Now a half-moon size is untouched,
What is half moon? Tell me when is half moon, ah.
Ah, give ear to me. Ah, give ear to me, farmer boy.
What comes from all your hard work?
What do the stubborn fields produce?
 Apples and pears, persimmons,
 Apples sweet, dates good to eat,
 Juicy persimmons, ah.
In the west the sun has set,
In the east the moon appears.
A half-moon size of field untouched—
What is half moon? When comes half moon?

Korean Mountain Song

(Translation)

Though our hills pierce not the sky, how fair !
Trees are no less green than those of sky-piercing hills.
Our hills, higher peaks boast no greener trees than these.
The winds from verdured south and rainy east blow with
 strength,
Men proud and skilful hold their breath,
They grow weak and faint when they behold our hills.
The moon looks upon the enchantment of dreaming earth.
Tell me, is it mountain or lake?
Our hills are low, but higher peaks boast no lovelier beauty.
Eventide reveals a deeper beauty,
And in the sky-reflecting streams lie gold and pearls—
If not gold or pearls, what are they?

Korean Sweet Sixteen Folk Song

(Translation)

Two times eight, young like that,
Let us improve our minds,
Two times eight, ah, young as that.

Time flies swiftly as the stream,
All too soon folks grow old,
Time flies swiftly as a dream.

Don't waste years when you're young,
Use the mornings thoughtfully—
Two times eight, young like that.

Korean Blue Gentian Song

(Translation)

Did you not tell me you'd climb the hill ?
You said you'd dig up blue gentian roots.
But you climbed not, nor dug the roots,
You had one long nap, you lazy bones.

Ah, time is gold,
Don't waste such gold,
Climb hills and dig,
Soon, soon you'll be old.

Did you not tell me you'd go to school ?
You said you'd study all afternoon,
But you did not study one line,
You spent the hours down at the zoo.

Ah, youth is lovely, youth is sweet,
A gift divine and never comes twice,
Let's climb life's hill and dig up roots,
That age be as lovely youth.

From an Egg Shell

Yesterday I heard a whispering
Of the strangest words and oddest phrases—
“Air—” “sunlight—” “spring—” “mother hen—”
“Fluffy chicks,” whatever they might be,
“Running to sheltering wing—”
“Scratching in earth—”
And, the queerest word,
But one that makes me want to peck at something—
“Struggle.”

My smooth, dark, comfortable house
Is quite enough for me
And all I need for nourishment—
Why worry about things I do not understand—
I'll sleep again.

Such queer phrases they were,
Without rhyme or reason—
I have no slightest wish to know their import—
Anyhow, I've forgotten all of them
Since my last nap,
I've forgotten every word except
“Struggle—”
I wonder what that means—
It has a deep and glorious sound —
“Struggle.”

Arithmetic

They plastered walls, they papered rooms,
They rowed up stream so many hours
Against the current, A and B—
A third would often complicate
The digging of an awful ditch,
A pale, anemic, lifeless C—

No sense could come to anything
When four of them were doing jobs—
The fourth was just a ghost, that D.
Tall A and B had curly hair,
They laid a carpet on the floor
(So long, so wide) good-naturedly.

Sometimes I fancied B looked sad
For A would die and leave a sum
Of money to his family—
I tried to find how much each got
After the funeral was held,
But only sorrow came to me.

A would recover from the grave
And from some opposite queer place
Would start to walk toward distant B—
I couldn't prove it, but I knew
They found each other on the road—
"They've met!" I'd shout out lustily.

Do you still excavate for wells?
And really, just how many hours
Did it all take you, A and B?
I wonder, would you recognize
The world today and leave the toil
To others, folks like Y and Z?

Two More Leaves

In the Old Mission Garden

That bit of time between the dawn and night,
Charmed and enchanting interlude ! The years
Placed in our hands their magic gift, a day,
Moments to be forevermore just ours.

The tide was full, the tide of loveliness
Surrounding us, beauty of earth and sky,
A tide that could not ebb for it was caught
And made immovable in memory.

At times we spoke. Sometimes our silence said
Profoundly more than words. We found the peace,
The binding heart to heart tranquillity
That trees can give, blossoms and sunlit grass.

No future hour can ever bring real fear
To us, dear heart. We found the certainties.
That day, symbolic of our love, pronounced
Its benediction on all coming days.

The Chasm

We feared the strange domain constraining us
To come. Between our safe, familiar way
And that new kingdom, ominously gray
A chasm stretched. Rocks loomed precipitous
To our uncertain steps. Vine pendulous
With alien growth and spiders' webs would sway
With serpents' writhings—so it seemed. Each day
Appeared controlled by forces blasphemous ;

We halted at the noise of whirling pools.
Despite our dread of that abysmal breach,
We viewed the land again from Victory Ridge
Then knew we must go on. Some called us fools.
We started for a world beyond our reach—
Lo, buttressed by the rocks we feared, a bridge !

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Maple leaves /

PS Baker, Catherine, b.1879.
3503 Maple leaves [by] Catherine Baker. [Los
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M3 74p. (on double leaves) 23cm.

Poems.

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